

PROTECTING WOMEN'S SPORTS OR POLICING WOMANHOOD?

Ideological Analysis of Riley Gaines's Anti-Transgender Rhetoric

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PURPOSE

This study analyzes **Riley Gaines's rhetoric on transgender athletes** to examine the ideology she advances as a member of an anti-transgender social movement opposing transgender inclusion in sports.

Sources examined:

- Gaines's posts on X (formerly Twitter)
- *The Riley Gaines Show* podcast



METHOD

Ideological Criticism was used to analyze the systems of belief and assumptions that shape Gaines's interpretation of transgender athletes. Ideological critiques focus on what happens when a rhetor's audience accepts Gaines's interpretations.

Analytical process:

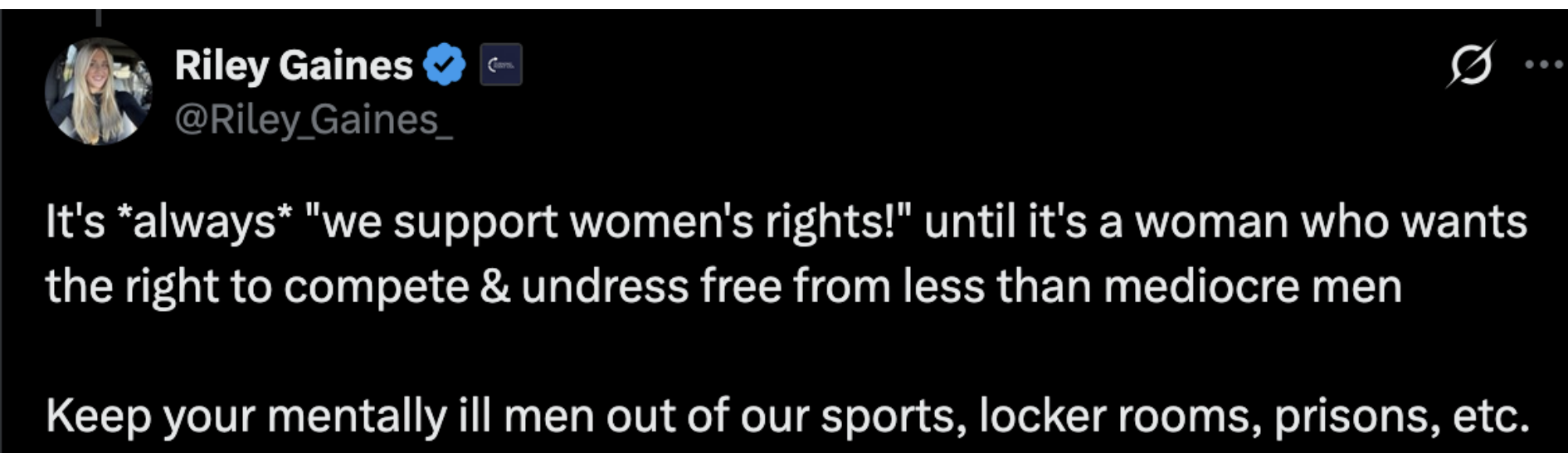
- Conducted a literature review to inform pre-writing analysis questions
- Used questions as a guide to evaluate Gaines's rhetoric
- Analyzed textual elements, ideologies, and themes across X posts and podcast episodes



FINDINGS

The analysis finds that Gaines advances four core rhetorical claims:

1 Describes transgender women as **not real women**



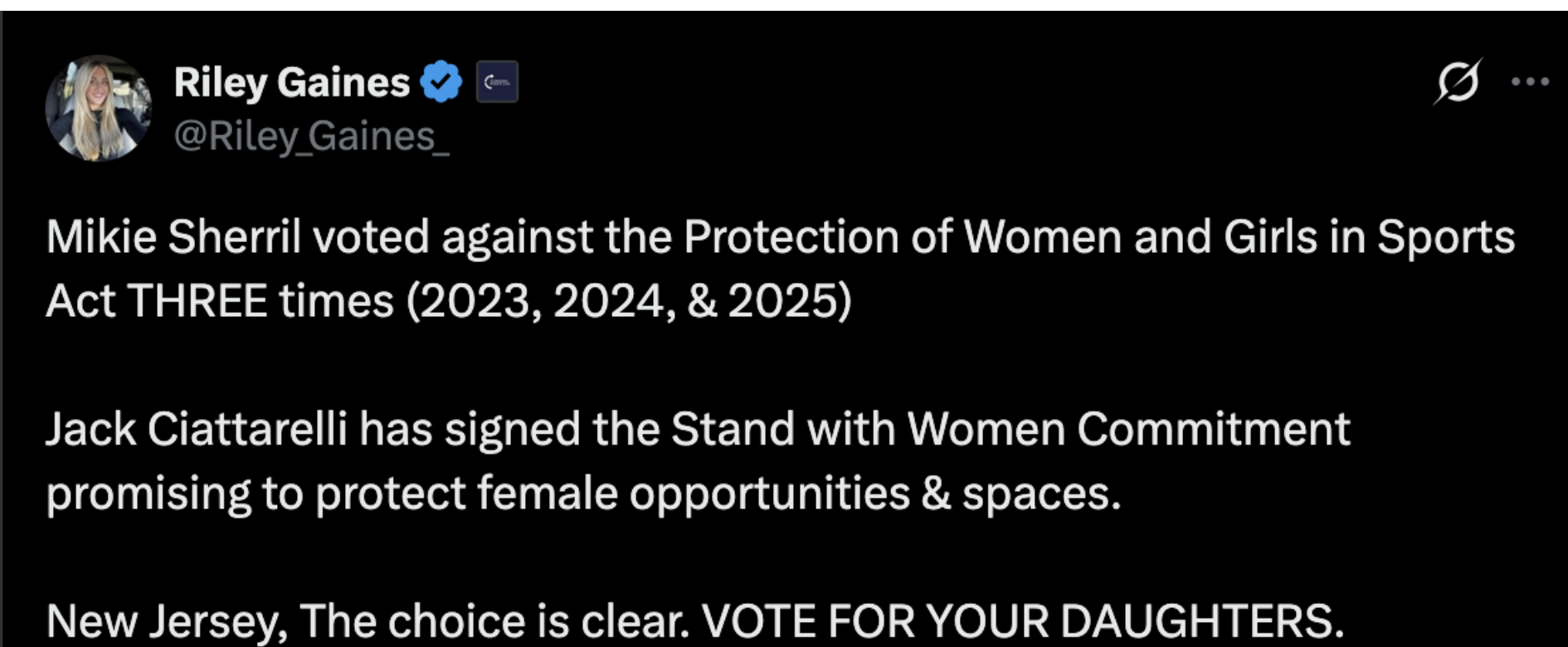
2 Presents transgender women as **inherently stronger** than cisgender women



3 Argues that cisgender women **need protection** from transgender athletes



4 Endorses **legislative bans and Republican candidates** as the means of protection



IMPLICATIONS

Echo chambers & influencer reach: Unlike prior studies focused on legislators or media, this work examines anti-transgender rhetoric spread by **individual influencers**. Social media amplifies these messages, forming an echo chamber where Gaines's audience never sees pro-transgender viewpoints

Overstated replacement narrative: Gaines's claim that cisgender women are being replaced overstates transgender participation. In 2024, only **1.4% of U.S. high school students** identified as transgender, with even fewer participating in sports, making wholesale replacement statistically improbable.

Alignment with right-wing narratives: Gaines's replacement framing echoes language from the 2017 Charlottesville protests (trans women replace cis women), and casts Republicans as defenders of women's sports while framing Democrats as anti-woman.